

## **Holy Father Pope John Paul II Meeting the Religious Leaders in New Delhi**

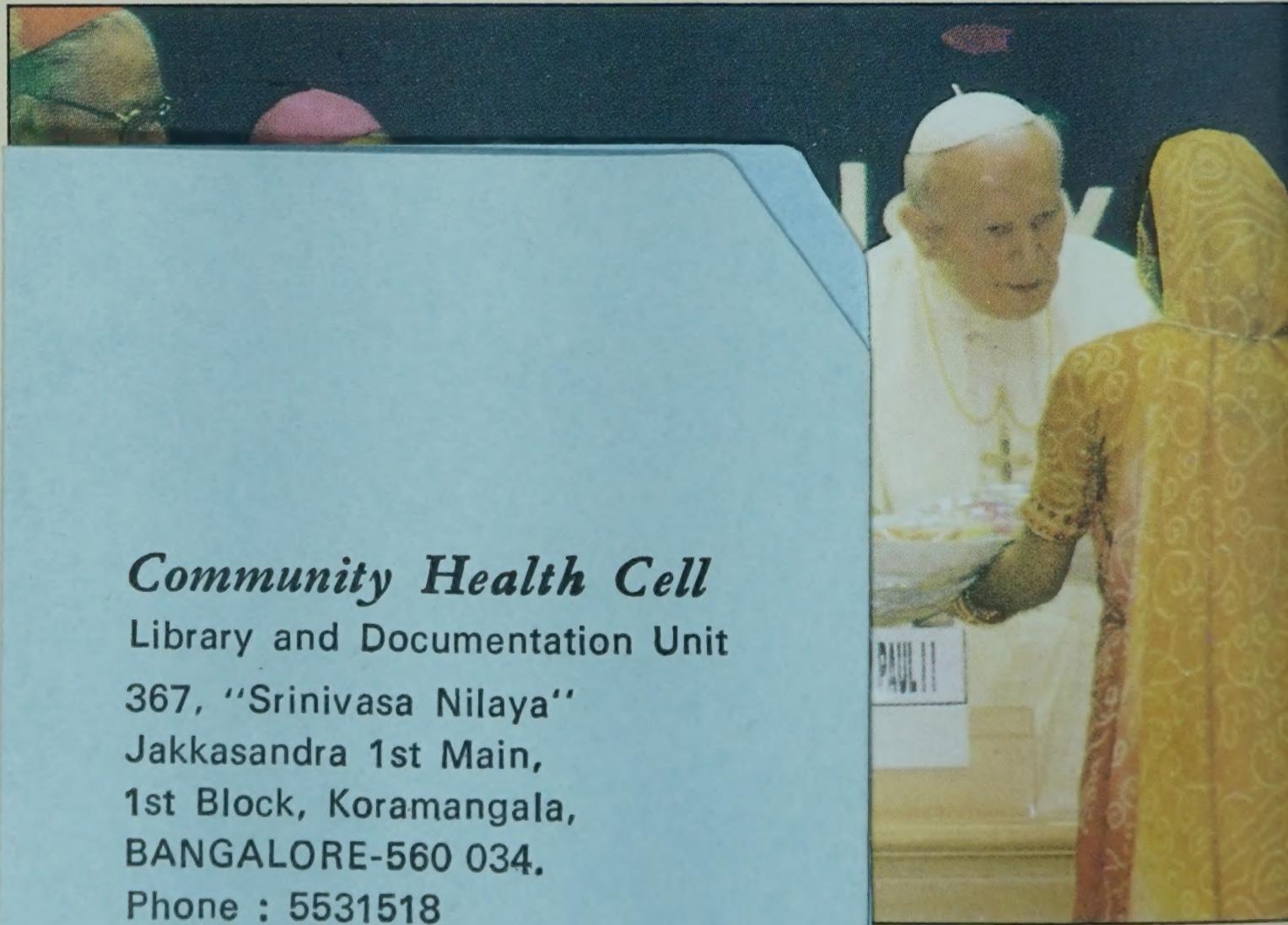
Organized by  
CBCI Commission for Interreligious Dialogue  
Delhi Archdiocesan Commission for  
Interreligious Dialogue

Sunday 7th November, 1999

Vigyan Bhavan  
New Delhi-110 001



Holy Father John Paul II enters Vigyan Bhawan  
to participate in the Interreligious Leaders' Meeting  
He is greeted with the bunch of flowers



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meeting the Religious Leaders in New Delhi".

*Edited and Published by*

Rev. Dr. A. Suresh

Executive Secretary

CBCI Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue

CBCI Centre, 1, Ashok Place

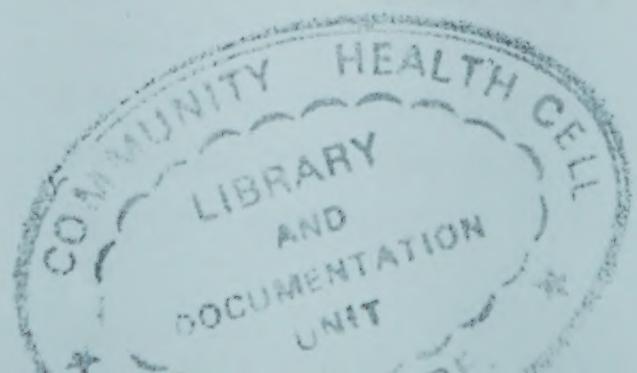
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# INTRODUCTION

Promoting Interreligious Dialogue and collaboration among religions for the well-being of the society, particularly for the upliftment of the poor and marginalized, is the subject very close to the heart of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, the head of the Roman Catholic Church. For this noble cause, he is very keen on meeting the great religious leaders whenever he visits a country. During his visit to India in 1986 he met the leaders of various religions at Rajaji Hall, Madras, on 5th February. In his message the Holy Father said, "Dialogue between members of different religions increases and deepens mutual respect and paves the way for relations that are crucial in solving the problems of human suffering".

In the same year on 27th of October Holy Father Pope John Paul II inaugurated the "World Day of Prayer for Peace" at Assisi and welcomed the representatives of the different Churches and Religions to pray and work for peace in the world. In his welcome address Holy Father said, "The coming together of so many religious leaders to pray is in itself an invitation today to the world to become aware that there exists another dimension of peace and another way of promoting it which is not a result of negotiations, political compromise

or economic bargainings. It is the result of prayer, which, in the diversity of religions, expresses a relationship with a supreme power that surpasses our human capacities alone".

Recently Holy father visited India for the second time. During his visit, an Interreligious Leaders' Meeting was organized at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on 7th November, 1999.

We are pleased to bring out in a book form all the speeches of different religious leaders and the message of the Holy father, presented during this historical event, for the benefit of those who are interested and involved in promoting Interreligious fellowship and cooperative action among religions.

*Rev. Dr. A. Suresh*

Jagatguru Shankaracharya  
Madhavanandji  
*The Seer of Prayag Peeth*

The Emperor of the heart of millions of Christians,

Shri Pope John Paul II Ji,

You are welcome in Bharat, as both the head of a nation and the religious head of the Catholics. We, the Hindu religious, teachers, have as our culture - truth, non-violence, love and good conduct. The Vedas are the foremost of our Scriptures. The Vedas, the words of Brahma, instruct us to regard our Mother as a Goddess, our Father as God, our Teacher as God and our Guest as God. Following these instructions of our Scriptures, we welcome our State Guest.

Our country, Bharat, is great and our religion is extremely magnanimous. You are on a mission to establish spiritual unity in the world and we are with you. Do accept the openness of our religion and our love. We also desire your co-operation in making our holy culture a culture of the world. I repeat, we desire and request that you help spread our message of love to all

the countries of the world and strengthen and support our feelings of universal love. We are extremely grateful for your message of love and for your visit to Bharat.

# Dr. Mufti M. Mukarram Ahmed

## *Shahi Imam, Khateeb - Shahi Masjid*

In the name of Allah, the beneficent and merciful, praise be to Allah, the cherisher and sustainer of the world, most reverend, most merciful and master of the day of judgement. Most honorable Holy Father, honorable members of the House, brothers and sisters, it is nice and historical occasion that all of us are gathered for a noble cause. The word 'Religion' is delivered from a Latin word 'The Ligare' which means, "Return to God". Human being is the central point of divine creation. To work out and understand humanity in its simplest meaning is to practice and follow the path what the last prophet Mohammed "Peace be upon him", said and practiced. His teachings to mankind are not meant for a particular group, sect, cast, colour and culture only, but to the whole of creation and the Holy Quran pronounces it, "We see thee not but mercy for all the ages". Let's pray that truth prevails, service to the mankind be the sole purpose of this divine creation.

Our service be stainless, pious and selfless; all turned to Him having a righteous justified approach, in the shown path of the last Prophet

‘Peace be upon Him’. On this auspicious international occasion, in the presence of renowned personality, I pray and hope that the message and purpose of this historical meeting reach to all.

We should live with love, sympathy, tolerance and cooperation. I, in my personal capacity thank sincerely to the organizers who provided me this pious opportunity for this noble cause. Praise be to Allah, the cherisher and sustainer of the world. Thanks.

## Bhai Manjit Singh Sahib Sikh - Jathedar

Ek Om Kar satnam karta poorakh nirbhau,  
nirvair aakalmoorth ajooni saheb Guru prasad,

Respected Pope, the highly honored religious leaders and my dear brothers and sisters,

“Vahe Guru ji ka kahalsa vahe Guru ji ki fatheh”.

Today, the land of sages and prophets is blessed because a great man has come. He is the leader of a religion where Jesus Christ concretised devotion to God and drank the martyrdom; it is the leader of such a religion who has come here with the message of peace. We are honoured with the presence of the Pope.

A country where today Diwali is celebrated in the spirit of joy and splendor; a day known in history as the day of victory of good over evil. On this very same day, the 6th Guru of the Sikhs, Shri Hargobind Sahib freed 52 Hindu kings from the captivity of Jehangir held at Gwalior fort and took them to the holy seat of the Sikhs - Gurudwara Shri Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar. To welcome their leader, the Guru, the entire

Sikh community extended a rousing reception, decorating the city with Deepmalas. Reaching of Guru Hargobind Sahib in Harmandir is celebrated as “Bandi Chod” day. Meaning of this is that the Mughal ruler, Jehangir due to his religious narrowmindedness captured Shri Hargobind Sahib and later on when Jehangir wanted to release him he sent a message to Hargobind Sahib, “ I want to release you from the Gwalior Fort”. Then the Guru Sahib replied that he could vacate the fort of Gwalior only if Jehangir freed the Hindu Rajas whom he held captive. Jehangir then laid the condition that all the kings who could hold on to the Gurus “chola” would be freed. Guru Hargobind then ordered his disciples and followers that such a chola with 52 corners, 52 pleats be made so that all the 52 kings could hold on to it and thus be freed. I mentioned it today because the Pope is here; in this land of sages and monks the name of God and the devotion to God through acts of charity and good works are always held in high esteem. There is no place for narrowmindedness, here Om Shanti, Om Shanti is recited and there is a tradition of living together and embracing everybody.

In India, people of all religions are brothers and there is no place for communalism. Whenever

a man, overcome with pride or religious feelings, has attacked, the religion or the holy seats of any religion or has hurt anyone's individualism then the great souls of this land have come forward and sacrificed their own life to mend the way.

An example of love for humanity and brotherhood lies in the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur, the 9th Guru of the Sikhs which took place in Delhi, the capital of India. The reason why he became a martyr was that he stood for all religions. The then Mughal ruler, Aurangzeb, wanted to convert the Hindus and their places of worship to Islam. Hindus (Pandits from Jammu) pleaded to the Guru to help them. Teg Bahadur replied that if Aurangzeb succeeded in converting him to Islam, the others should follow. The Guru then visited and told Aurangzeb that it has been the traditions of India to respect all religions and their beliefs. " If you want to change forcefully someone's religion then it can not be granted. People will sacrifice their lives for the honour of their religion.." Here again Guru Teg Bahadur spoke of sacrifice and thus he was martyred.

The world is eagerly awaiting the arrival of the 21st century. Let's pledge to make it a century

of spiritual knowledge and progress by destroying the evil of religious communalism. Let us pledge to rise above communalism and respect other's religious sentiments and our own. Let's devote ourselves to the cause of mankind. Let's live by remembering God and his creation and serving His foremost creation, man. We will thus be freed from worldly pleasures. Let's free ourselves so that remembering God is not a routine to be followed every night and day, but freeing mankind from everyday problems. Be a part of a religion where mankind achieves its spiritual peace and happiness. In the end, I would quote Nanak's prayer :

“Jagat Jalandhar Rakh le  
Apni Kripa Dhar  
Jit dware Ubre  
Tite Laho Ubar”  
Wahe Guru Ki Kripa

# His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya

## *Jain Muni*

I am happy to be amongst the gathering of leaders of many religious orders in the world, who have assembled here today. All the people in the world follow one or the other religion. They have respect and regard for the revered saints and temporal heads of various religions. This places great responsibility on the religious heads. I am sure, that it would contribute substantially to the good of the humanity and world peace if religious heads meet regularly, share their perceptions and help and guide the people through their respective religious forums.

So far as Jain philosophy and religious tradition goes, its main premise is philosophy of “ANEKANT” — multi-angular vision. It has four aspects — Equanimity, Freedom, Relativity and Coexistence.

We believe in the equality of all creatures in the world and unity of the human race. We therefore do not subscribe to casteism and fundamentalism in religious pursuits.

Each person has a right to exist in this world and we value his freedom.

Interpretations of religious doctrines and precepts are all very relative to time and their context. Therefore divergent views need to be synthesized and conflicts avoided. All religious sects should avoid pitching themselves against each other and thereby providing opportunity for conflicts, as these situations cause great harm to religion.

In a composite formation, diagonally opposite views do coexist. Every thing is bi-polar and therefore, there would always be a counter-point to a point. However they can adjust each other in a friendly disposition.

Now we are at the fag end of the 20th century. The whole world is busy preparing for entering into 21st century. There is a question-mark as to how the religious society will enter — whether it will enter into 21st century with the same old face of 20th century or with a new face? The mutual conflicts in the religious field have dimmed the brightness of religion. Let the religious people enter into the 21st century with a new face; let them try to solve their religious problems through peaceful deliberation, sitting together at the same forum. The nations of the world have already created a forum at which they sit together to solve their problems. In fact,

such a forum was required to be created by the religious world, but they could not do so. Religious people are more busy with increasing the number of their followers rather than paying attention to the challenges that beset religion. Hence, people thinking in scientific way do not have the feeling of respect for religion.

If religious people decide to sit together on a common platform to deliberate over the issues of liberating the world from the problems of environment, crimes, terrorism, fundamentalism and violence, we hope that it would result in causing the life-style of the world to usher in peaceful coexistence.

Today, I feel, as if this auditorium of 'Vigyan Bhavan' (House of Science) has become 'Adhayatma Bhavan' (Abode of spirituality). We have assembled here on the occasion of the visit of a highly revered head of one of the great religions in the world.

Your Holiness, may I suggest whether we can build a platform or a forum, where all of us from different religions can sit together and resolve the contentious issues that surface in the realm of religion and try to find a peaceful and non-violent solution to those problems?

Morality and spiritualism are the cardinal and eternal precepts of Religion. Let us join together to promote them among people of the world. I believe that in this endeavour the contribution of Your Holiness would be of special significance. I am sure your perceptions and views in this context would be of immense value, to which all of us would look forward to.

Dr. K. Rajaratnam  
President, National Council of  
Churches in India

Holy Father,

The National Council of Churches in India representing all the Protestant and Orthodox Churches and all Indian Christian organisations like the Students Christian Movement of India, YMCA, YWCA and National Missionary Society and several other all India Christian organisations, spread throughout the length and breadth of the vast country deem it a great privilege to extend a warm welcome and greet Your Holiness in the name of Jesus Christ on the occasion of the visit of Your Holiness to our country. We are also highly appreciative of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and in particular His Grace Archbishop of New Delhi, Most Rev. Alan de Lastic for giving us this unique opportunity to demonstrate the ecumenical unity in this country.

We in India are privileged to acknowledge the great contribution Your Holiness has made to the cause of human rights and liberty of enslaved

people in the true spirit of Jesus Christ in many realms in the world and your visit to our country will also strengthen the faith of God's 'little flock' to continue to minister to all God's people in this country in steadfast faith and commitment to Jesus Christ.

The Indian Ecumenical Church, represented by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India and the National Council of Churches in India, is seeking to serve the lowly and the meek as well as meet the challenges of our faith in this ancient land of ours – multi-religious and multi-cultural society, experiencing Unity in Diversity over generations ever since the Christian Church has found its home in India since two thousand years now.

The National Council of Churches in India is of the firm belief that today in India it is the dawn of the finest hour of the God's Church. It opens up opportunities for bold and positive affirmation of the faith of the Church through unity of the Church in India, atleast of the National Council of the Churches in India and the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, as is accomplished in some of the countries of the world.

Today also opens up the opportunity for the Church to explore new avenues for unity and fellowship with other ancient and living faiths in India which represent deep spiritual values. We express the hope that your visit will inspire true and lasting ecumenism of Christian faithful on the one hand, and wider ecumenism with all religions that believe in God on the other, so that together, our brothers and sisters belonging together, believers of all religions might struggle to liberate millions and millions of fellow human beings from fetters of all kinds.

Your Holiness , Thank you.

## Samdhong Rinphoche Buddhist Monk

Your Holiness Pope John Paul II, and fellow religious present at the dais, today, I am here to greet His Holiness the Pope from the core of my heart for coming amidst us.

Different religions have originated in the world. According to Lord Buddha the capacity of truth and greed are different from person to person in the world. Therefore our religious traditions may not be beneficial for all and in equal measure. But, different religious practices are beneficial for all people around the world. That is why all religions are respectable and honorable and no religion is superior or inferior. Lord Buddha preached equal importance for all the religions. In today's world, Christianity has the maximum number of followers. For the last two thousand years through Christianity an unlimited number of people have benefited from it and have found a way to salvation. That is why this religion is worthy of praise, compliments and gratitude. Through His Holiness Pope John Paul II, I would like to offer my congratulations and felicitations to these religious traditions. His Holiness Pope John Paul II's personal efforts to advocate cooperation and inter-religious

dialogue are highly appreciated and I support him in this area.

This 20th century has remained an unusual century. During this period many changes have taken place in this world. Due to this humanity has faced violence, destruction and suffering. Today the time has come for all the followers of all religions to come together and think what best can be done for the betterment of the world and save it from destruction. Today's world is facing challenges like violence, terrorism, war, financial hardships and religious intolerance, environmental pollution. Today, the fate of humanity hangs in danger. At such a time if followers of all the religions do not come together to face these dangers collectively, this problem cannot be solved and we will not be able to save humanity.

Tolerance alone cannot work wonders. The talk of tolerance among all religions has become old. The Mahatma has also talked of bringing all the religions together. The need of the hour is to bring all religions together. To accept the ideas of other religions and philosophy is not sufficient. All religions are for the benefit of the world are correct in their respective places. No religion is superior or inferior. Our aim should

be to stress on this point and His Holiness, His Excellency, Pope John Paul II has done tremendous work in this direction, for which I want to thank Him. He studied different religions and practiced cooperation with other religions. In this regard you are altogether different from other traditional missionaries. Specifically the book you have written, "Crossing the threshold of Hope", in which you have expressed your views about other religions, is appreciable especially the views expressed about Buddhism in all honesty are admirable. The efforts which you have been making for the past so many years, come to my mind, especially about the conference which took place in Assisi some years ago and the recent one which was held at your own place.

Through these religious conferences you have done a tremendous job and I hope this will continue in future. I pray to God for you, for a long and healthy life.

## Ervad Cawas Daraius Bagli Parsi Head Priest

In order to live for a long time, health of the body is necessary. May the glory remain permanent in association with righteousness! May all these heavenly yazatas (and) the yazatas of this world (and) the seven Amshaspands come to this excellent votive offerings! May this benediction (of mine) be approved! May this wish of mine be fulfilled! May the Religion of Zarathushtra be pleased (liked or chosen) amongst all men! May it be so!

O God! The Creator! May you keep forever, cheerful, healthy the Lord of this world, all the assemblies \* HAMA ANJUMAN \* (the name of the person in whose honour the prayer is made should be taken here) together with his descendants, may you keep them thus. Over the chieftainship of the good (or worthy) men may you keep permanent and Lord for many years and for boundless period. May there be a thousands blessings! May the year be auspicious! May the day be fortunate (and) may the month be auspicious! May you keep us worthy (in performing) the worship and invocation and charity and in offering libations for several years, several days and several months, for many years!

May you keep righteousness over all actions and  
meritorious deeds! May there be health and  
goodness (unto thee)! May there be excellence  
(unto thee)! May it be so! May it be more so!  
May (thy) wish be in accordance with (the wish  
of) the yazatas and the Amshahpands!

Ezekiel Isaac Malekar  
Honorary Secretary  
Judah Hyam Synagogue

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Most Respected Archbishop of Delhi, and Member, National Integration Council, religious and spiritual Leaders, distinguished guests, brothers and sisters,

At the outset, I take an opportunity to wish you all a Very Happy Deepawali - a festival of Lights where the victory of good over evil is celebrated. Promoting harmony among religions is a subject close to the heart of His Holiness. Hence it will be a unique occasion to affirm once again our common commitment to the unity of all religions. May the lights kindled today illuminate this planet with wisdom and peace.

I, on behalf of the Indian Jewish Community most respectfully welcome His Holiness to this Holy Land, the birth place of Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda and Guru Rabindranath Tagore. His Holiness, as you know, India is a multi-religious country where different religious groups are co-existing without coming into conflict with each other. The peaceful existence

of the Jews in India for more than 20 centuries is a shining testimony to be complete absence of anti-Semitism in this country, which has proved to be such a haven of shelter to all persecuted people. Therefore we all consider ourselves as Indians first and then Jews/ Christians, Muslims, etc. Since we all believe in the unity in diversity and Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam- "World is one family"

His Holiness, your visit to India will boost inter-religious co-operation in the struggle to eliminate hunger, poverty, ignorance, persecution, discrimination and enslavement of the human spirit. The twentieth century is a century, which has witnessed ups and downs in human assertions for dignity, and freedom which, perhaps no other century had experienced. The legacy of struggle for freedom and dignity of human person and increasing forms of brutality, have thrown the human species at cross roads. The humanity landed itself at the end of the 20th century in a more violent, brutalized and dehumanized world.

We are entering into a new millennium in troubled times. Our society is torn by conflicts, between young and old, the tragedy and inhumanity of war, new diseases, etc. For many of us the future

might seem very dark and gloomy. However all of us should affirm light in the face of darkness and despair. Our hope lies in together affirming those words of our Torah; "I have set before you life and death, a blessing and a curse; choose life and live". His Holiness with your blessings May we all become successful in our search for new paths and goals. May the ideals of all religions inspire us and challenge us to make New Millenium, years of commitment, of fulfillment and inspiration. May the Coming Millenium be a good, healthy, successful, peaceful, harmonious, and joyous for all of us and all our loved ones as inscribed in the Book of Life. AMEN.

## Mrs. Zena Sorabjee Baha'i Representative

Your Holiness Pope John II, Your Eminences the Cardinals and Archbishops, honorable speakers and guests, I stand here today to represent the Baha'i community of India at this august and distinguished gathering in the gracious presence of His Holiness, the spiritual head of millions of Catholics spread in all parts of the globe, and who is a much loved and revered leader amongst the nations of the world.

The Baha'is would like to offer our sincere and respectful felicitations to His Holiness for having undertaken this long and arduous journey to uplift the spirit of the numerous Catholics, the followers of Jesus Christ in this country.

As His Holiness mentioned yesterday, the largest number of religions coexist in India where the Constitution upholds the right of every individual to believe in and practice the religion of his free choice. Mention was also made of the need for unity in diversity and respect to be accorded to all religions.

The Baha'is of the world, followers of Baha'u'llah, strongly support every step which

is directed towards upholding the unity of religions. It is an article of our faith that there is but one religion and the Source of that religion is the Creator, God. Different religions are but progressive chapters in that book of religion. Baha'u'llah states: "That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is in this day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one source, and are the rays of one light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated".

He also wrote: "The religion of God and the creed of God hath been revealed and made manifest from the heaven of the will of the king of pre-existence for the sake of union and harmony among the people of the world; make it not a means for disagreement and discord.."

"From a fair minded examination of the actual utterances of the Founders of the great religions, and of the social milieus in which they were obliged to carry out their missions, there is nothing to support the contentions and



prejudices deranging the religious communities of mankind and therefore all human affairs.”

In order to confirm the belief that ‘we are all the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch, created by the one Creator, and in order to assist in the progressive eradication of all forms of prejudice, disharmony and conflict, the Baha’i House of Worship the most visited spot in Delhi has been dedicated to all peoples irrespective of religious background.

We would also like to offer our sincere congratulations and gratitude to His Holiness for having graciously consented to be present at this platform where representatives of different religious-communities can come together to appreciate the futility of stressing upon differences and the need to emphasize upon the commonalties which can lead to a harmonious world.

The Baha’is would like to assure His Holiness of our prayers for a long life, good health and a safe journey home.

# His Holiness Pope John Paul II

## *Head of the Roman Catholic Church*

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Religious Leaders,  
Dear Friends,

1. It is a great joy for me to visit once again the beloved land of India and to have this opportunity in particular to greet you, the representatives of different religious traditions, which embody not only great achievements of the past but also the hope of a better future for the human family. I thank you, Your Excellency, for your thoughtful words, and through you I thank the Government and the people of India for the welcome I have received. I come among you as a pilgrim of peace and as a fellow-traveller on the road that leads to the complete fulfilment of the deepest human longings. On the occasion of *Diwali*, the festival of lights, which symbolizes the victory of life over death, good over evil, I express the hope that this meeting will speak to the world of the things which unite us all: our common human origin and destiny, our shared responsibility for people's well-being and progress, our need of the light and strength that we seek in our religious convictions. Down the ages and in so many ways, India has taught that

truth which the great Christian teachers also propose, that men and women “by inward instinct” are deeply oriented towards God and seek him from the depths of their being (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.60, art. 5, 3). On this basis, I am convinced that together we can successfully take the path of understanding and dialogue.

2. My presence here among you is meant as a further sign that the Catholic Church wants to enter ever more deeply into dialogue with the religions of the world. She sees this dialogue as an act of love which has its roots in God himself. “God is Love”, proclaims the New Testament, “and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him...Let us love, then, because he has loved us first...no one who fails to love the brother whom he sees can love God whom he has not seen” (1Jn. 4:16, 19-20).

It is a sign of hope that the religions of the world are becoming more aware of their shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the human family. This is a crucial part of the globalization of solidarity which must come if the future of the world is to be secure. This sense of shared responsibility increases as we discover more of what we have in common as religious men and women.

Which of us does not grapple with the mystery of suffering and death? Which of us does not hold life, truth, peace, freedom and justice to be supremely important values? Which of us is not convinced that moral goodness is soundly rooted in the individual's and society's openness to the transcendent world of the Divinity? Which of us does not believe that the way to God requires prayer, silence, asceticism, sacrifice and humility? Which of us is not concerned that scientific and technical progress should be accompanied by spiritual and moral awareness? And which of us does not believe that the challenges now facing society can only be met by building a civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty? And how can we do this, except through encounter, mutual understanding and cooperation?

3. The path before us is demanding, and there is always the temptation to choose instead the path of isolation and division, which leads to conflict. This in turn unleashes the forces, which make religion an excuse for violence, as we see too often around the world. Recently, I was happy to welcome to the Vatican representatives of the world religions who had gathered to build upon the achievements of the Assisi Meeting in

1986. I repeat here what I said to that distinguished Assembly: “Religion is not, and must not become a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identity coincide. Religion and peace go together: to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction”. Religious leaders in particular have the duty to do everything possible to ensure that religion is what God intends it to be – a source of goodness, respect, harmony and peace! This is the only way to honour God in truth and justice!

Our encounter requires that we strive to discern and welcome whatever is good and holy in one another, so that together we can acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral truths which alone guarantee the world’s future (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2). In this sense, dialogue is never an attempt to impose our own views upon others, since such dialogue would become a form of spiritual and cultural domination. This does not mean that we abandon our own convictions. What it means is that, holding firmly to what we believe, we listen respectfully to others, seeking to discern all that is good and holy, all that favours peace and cooperation.

4. It is vital to recognize that there is a close

and unbreakable bond between peace and freedom. Freedom is the most noble prerogative of the human person, and one of the principal demands of freedom is the free exercise of religion in society (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3). No State, no group has the right to control, either directly or indirectly, a person's religious convictions, nor can it justifiably claim the right to impose or impede the public profession and practice of religion, or the respectful appeal of a particular religion to people's free conscience. Recalling this year, the fiftieth anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, I wrote that "religious freedom constitutes the very heart of human rights. Its inviolability is such that individuals must be recognized as having the right even to change their religion, if their conscience so demands. People are obliged to follow their conscience in all circumstances and cannot be forced to act against it" (cf. Article 18, *Message for the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 5).

5. In India, the way of dialogue and tolerance was the path followed by the great Emperors Ashoka, Akbar and Chatrapati Shivaji; by wise men like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda; and by luminous figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Gurudeva Tagore and

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who understood profoundly that to serve peace and harmony is a holy task. These are people who, in India and beyond, have made a significant contribution to the increased awareness of our universal brotherhood, and they point us to a future where our deep longing to pass through the door of freedom will find its fulfilment because we will pass through that door together. To choose tolerance, dialogue and cooperation as the path into the future is to preserve what is most precious in the great religious heritage of the human race. It is also to ensure that in the centuries to come the world will not be without that hope which is the life-blood of the human heart. May the Lord of heaven and earth grant this now and forever.





## **Christianity**

Do to others whatever you would have them do to you.

*Mathew 7:12*

## **Hinduism**

This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.

*Mahabharata, XIII:114*

## **Islam**

No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

*an-Nawawi, 40 Hadith, 13.*

## **Sikhism**

Do not create enmity with anyone as God is within everyone.

*Guru Arjan Devji 258, Guru Granth Sahib.*

## **Jainism**

In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.

*Mahavira.*

## **Buddhism**

A state which is not pleasant or enjoyable for me will also not be so for him; and how can I impose on another a state which is not pleasant or enjoyable for me?

*Samyutta Kikaya, V.*

## **Zoroastrianism**

That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.

*Dadistan-i-Dinik, 94.5.*

## **Judaism**

What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. That is the law: all the rest is commentary.

*Talmud, Shabbat 31a.*

## **Baha'i**

Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself.

*Baha'ullah. Tablets of Baha'ullah, 71.*



Holy Father Pope John Paul II greets the Religious Leaders  
Most Rev. George Punnakotil, Chairman of the CBCI  
Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue  
presents to the Holy Father the Document  
Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana 1998.

